

## Roundtable with Traveling Press

**Secretary Condoleezza Rice**

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### Secretary Rice Travel to the Middle East and Europe

**SECRETARY RICE:** All right, let me just take a couple of minutes to wrap up the trip and then a few questions. As you know, I came out during this trip to do a couple of things. First, it was important to spend some time with the regional states concerning the President's plan for Iraq and I had an opportunity to talk to people in more detail about what the thinking was, why the decisions have been taken that have been taken, I think to lay some groundwork for future support of the regional states for Iraq's unity government, and also to talk to them about concerns that they have about the course of events in Iraq. And so that was really useful time.

The GCC+2, despite its awkward name, Glenn, is becoming -- (laughter). Remember, Glenn, Germany was unified by the 2+4 so it tends to be the way international bodies are named. But the GCC+2 I think is becoming a very useful forum. It's now met four times since September and people always comment on the usefulness of the discussions, the candidness of the discussions. It's -- as with most things, it's sort of building a kind of momentum of its own as a good forum in which to discuss the complicated issues of the Middle East right now. So in any case, that was part of the trip.

The other major effort was to talk to the Israelis and the Palestinians. I really didn't come out with a preconceived notion of what might be possible. I did think that it was a good opportunity to come and to listen to people as to how they saw the future. I knew that there was momentum that had been generated by the meetings between Abbas and Olmert and, in fact, even before that with the speech that Olmert had given.

But it is a complicated time with all this going on in the Palestinian Authority and so I wanted to see what was possible. And it was really out of the talks with Abu Mazen and then the talks with Prime Minister Olmert that it became clear to me that something along these lines, a sort of informal opportunity to discuss these issues after six years, would be the most useful track to take. And Abu Mazen had mentioned something like this at the time of the Olmert meeting, but I wasn't really clear on what he meant. He talked about a back channel or where the contents weren't known or something like that. And so I was able to get some clarification and I think by talking to people and listening to people we moved the process forward, principally because everybody wants to stay within the context of the roadmap. The roadmap is very important because it's got sequence. Everybody understands the obligations in it. But we had gotten to a place that it was stalled because if they weren't making progress on the first phase of the roadmap they couldn't talk about the end of the roadmap and what might lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state. And I think we broke through that.

The next couple of weeks will be pretty intensive on the diplomatic front. I will obviously have a Quartet on February 2nd and then the next week the Egyptians are coming to Washington, Abu Gheit, and I think that we probably will have others to Washington as well. Undoubtedly, David and Elliott will travel to talk to advisors for Prime Minister Olmert and for President Abbas. I don't know precisely when they'll do that, but obviously we'll want to try and prepare the ground before I go back. And I would anticipate going back sometime in the first half of February. I have some constraints because of budget testimony and a conference that I have to chair on Liberia, but aside from that I plan to try to go back in the first half of February.

We will spend, I think, a good deal of time really trying to think about the agenda for this, to see what the parties want to put on the agenda. It really should be up to them to put anything on the agenda that they'd like, but it's very important to think about the establishment of the Palestinian state as having many different facets. There's a tendency to go to the big three issues right away, but in fact there are many other things that would have to be achieved for a Palestinian state and so I would expect the entire agenda to be there: security, (inaudible) security concerns, the nature of the Palestinian state.

One of the really important (inaudible) of the President on this issue, I think, has been that there has always been a lot of concern about what the borders of a state would be but there wasn't much attention given to its internal composition, democratic processes, institutions. And I find President Abbas more interested in that part of it, in building the institutions as well, and one thing that I think or want to do or will want to do over the next several weeks is to talk about what role others are going to play.

This is not just a process that the United States is going to be able to press forward on its own. I think the Arabs obviously have an important role to play, but also the Quartet, I think, Frank-Walter Steinmeier said yesterday, kind of steering group. By that I think he meant what kinds of efforts might be needed by other actors in the international community. You can imagine, for instance, on the economic side, on the institution building side, that there are other countries, perhaps the EU and others, that might be interested in playing a role there. So I think establishing almost an international team or an international consortium to support movement toward a Palestinian state is also extremely important.

We're not yet at the point where I think we can determine what we would do about formal negotiations when and if. It's really a time to try to get the parties into more of a confidence-building phase and we will see what comes after that.

So with that, let me take your questions.

**QUESTION:** Secretary Rice, I have to ask you about this Maliki interview with a group of reporters in Baghdad where he took exception to your response to Senator Biden -- and the context you recall (inaudible) -- and he said that your comments "give morale boosts for the terrorists and push them toward making an extra effort in making them believe they have defeated the American Administration. But I can tell you that they have not defeated the Iraqi Government." The particular comment that you said, in fact, at your testimony that Maliki knows he's on -- the Maliki government in a sense -- "I saw his resolve. I think he knows that his government is in effect on borrowed time."

**SECRETARY RICE:** First of all --

**QUESTION:** So let me ask you --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yeah.

**QUESTION:** This is our partner there. We have invested --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Andrea, let me just answer. (Laughter.)

**QUESTION:** She hasn't read it.

**SECRETARY RICE:** I have read it. But first of all, I'm sorry that -- if he took offense, I didn't mean any offense. And what was intended to be said there is, look, there's an urgency to this and he understands the urgency. But I, of all people, who speak a foreign language, should probably understand that sometimes things don't translate very well. And we have a -- we know what "on borrowed time" means. It means there's a sense of urgency, you've got to get it done now, there's not a moment to lose. I don't have any idea how he heard it, but I think we're on the same page. He knows that things are urgent and he's said that things are urgent, and that's how I take it. I don't think it's a major issue.

**QUESTION:** Except that what he has said is to "give morale boosts to the terrorists." I mean, how can he --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Andrea, obviously he read the comment differently than it was intended and I'm not concerned that he means anything more than he wants to get this done in an urgent fashion and I assume that it didn't translate very well. Sometimes these little phrases that for us mean a particular thing mean something quite different when they are read literally by other people.



So I'm sure it's quite fine and I've not heard from anyone, from Zal or anyone else about it, so I'm not concerned about it. We're on the same page. The Maliki government and the United States want the same thing and we have a plan as to how to go about it and, you know, that's what we're going to do.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, so much of the trip was about Iraq, but we only flew over it. I'm assuming you noticed the great view that we had of Baghdad on the way, but I wonder why you decided not to go to Iraq. Are you trying to give Maliki some room, as you suggested before? And you know, given the skepticism that you heard in the Arab world about the Maliki government, are you worried that the U.S. is putting -- is depending too much on the Maliki government to make this plan a success?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, obviously, the responsibility that the Iraqis bear for making this plan work is obvious. And it's just -- it's the nature of this struggle that the Iraqis are the ones who have to determine what kind of country they're going to be and carry that out, but the United States is going to be there to support them. I've been to Baghdad, I think six times, and I'm sure I will go again. It seemed to me that it made sense to let the Iraqis have some time to get their plans in order, to get ready to launch those plans. Bob Gates was just there and it just wasn't, from my mind, the right time to go, but I'm sure we'll go sometime in the near future.

**QUESTION:** May I ask about the Middle East peace process?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Sure.

**QUESTION:** Are you willing to basically put your reputation as Secretary of State on the line to get this done in the next two years, to keep going back to the region as often as possible? Because it's hard for I think a lot of us to see how you're going to get this done or anywhere close to that unless you do that. Or are you, in your mind, not quite decided that it's worth that effort?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, I will do whatever I can do to try to help establish a Palestinian state. You know, I don't think about it in terms of my reputation. I'm enough of an historian to know that my reputation will be what my reputation is. I just -- and it might be different in five months from five years to 50 years, and so I'm simply not going to worry about that. I'm going to be concerned about what we can get done when and how. And I obviously have been out here a lot and I expect I'll be out a lot again.

I'm aware that it takes not just deal-making and shuttle diplomacy to make it work. It also takes certain circumstances and certain commitments, and I think we've been actually creating those circumstances or helping to create those circumstances over the last several years, not over the last several months. The President's declaration of a two-state solution, the President's decision that he was not going to try to deal with Yasser Arafat, that there needed to be a democratization of a Palestinian political space, the President's support for withdrawal from Gaza -- I mean, there have been a number of steps here on the way to where we are now.

And I just hope that when people look at where we are now, they'll think about that entire evolution, because you don't build the possibility for breakthroughs on something as intractable as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by five months of shuttle diplomacy. You just don't. There has to be a process of laying groundwork and I think we've been laying groundwork and we'll see if we've laid enough groundwork to actually produce a breakthrough. I do think we've -- there's already been progress.

**QUESTION:** You've said several times on this trip how it's important to (inaudible) that we're looking at the geostrategic stars align. When you look at the situation in the Middle East, Abbas and Olmert are incredibly weak right now. When you look at Iraq, military commanders there with experience in Bosnia, an important Muslim element, say that as horrible as ethnic cleansing was, it at least created a map that was sustainable. Some of them wonder whether you don't have to let the parties in Baghdad do that terrible thing to get to a sustainable map.

So why, with all this effort, do you see the geostrategic stars aligning?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, first of all, a lot has happened in the Middle East in the last several years and a lot has clarified in the Middle East. I do think that the removal of Saddam Hussein set in motion a number of



other circumstances, other changes in the Middle East: the removal of an eastern front threat for Israel, for instance; the removal of the repression that, frankly, meant that Iraqis of different groups handled their politics through one group repressing another, and that has led to some deep grievances that have to play out in a political process. But a lot has happened.

And if you look at the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, I think that the realignment in which people understand that perhaps their interests now rest with the creation of a stable two-state solution, that's a pretty dramatic change in and of itself. And again, a lot of groundwork, not -- we tend to forget. You know, I hear people say a two-state solution, Palestinian state, as if that was always what we were driving for, when in fact, when the President said it in 2001 it was considered a very big thing for the President of the United States to do.

In fact, the United States had been, in past times, and not too far in the distant future -- or in the distant past, opposed to the establishment of a Palestinian state. And so when you have a Palestinian state -- the President declared that a Palestinian state is going to be the outcome here, it begins to change the -- it begins to condition the environment. And now you hear everyone, from the successors to Likud, including Prime Minister Sharon, the father of the settlement movement, talking about the two-state solution, accepting the two-state solution, accepting dividing the land, the Arabs saying essentially Israel is going to be here, we might as well learn to live with each other, even those who have not recognized Israel. And I think those conditions then, over the last few years, have now led to the place where these people want to get on about doing it.

Now sometimes, you hear, "Oh, they're this far apart." I don't think that for a minute. I think there are still really, really hard issues here. But you sense that the tectonic plates underneath this conflict have shifted.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, you've talked a lot about the false stability of the Middle East (inaudible) there, and yet you're courting support from three of the longstanding and arguably most authoritarian of those regimes still in power. Do you risk sort of the -- that you're selling out the democracy argument by asking for their help this way?

**SECRETARY RICE:** The processes here are long ones and what is very clear is that there are some young democratic states that have now been established and are at risk. And the support for those young democratic states is coming from a coalition of states that are concerned about the most immediate threat to those young democratic states which are actually playing out their extremism through trying to bring these young states down: Lebanon -- and I put Lebanon in that category because until they got rid of Syrian forces I think you were not talking about a democratic state that could operate in any fashion like that; Iraq and the Palestinian Authority, which is not a state but a democratic entity that could become the basis for a democratic Palestinian state.

Now, that doesn't mean that you don't continue to press for reforms in the states that make up that coalition that are not yet democratic. So I don't think you will ever go completely back in Egypt after the presidential elections that they held when certain taboos about what you could talk about and who you could criticize simply broke.

The Saudis had municipal elections. They've now raised expectations that that process is going to continue and that, in fact, women are going to be included in that process at a point in time. I had very interesting discussions with the Kuwaiti women, who now have the right to vote, about the effect that they think the women's right to vote in Kuwait is having throughout the Gulf. And of course, Jordan has actually been pretty actively reforming its political systems.

So it's -- no one ever expected that there would be a complete democratic revolution throughout the Middle East overnight, but you have had some very important democratic breakthroughs. And part of the goal is to safeguard those as you continue to press for political reform, and we're going to continue to press for political reform.

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary, coming back to the Arab-Israeli question.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yes.

**QUESTION:** I mean, you act as though this is somehow new, but I mean it's -- back in 2000 there was a summit with the leader of -- the Israelis' leader, the Palestinians, who met for all those days and talked about all these issues. Will the U.S. at some point be ready to put down some bridging proposals to have that kind of summitry?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Barbara --

**QUESTION:** What is new and different? It seems to me that Olmert now is weaker, frankly, than Barak was, and certainly Abbas is weaker than Arafat was.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, Barbara, let me just go to the premise that 2000 is just like 2007.

**QUESTION:** I'm not saying -- I'm saying that we're actually farther along in --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yeah, but let's look at where it really was in 2000, all right? You had Yasser Arafat, who I think now who had one foot in terror and one foot in politics. I would submit to you you were never going to get a Palestinian state and peace with Israel under those circumstances. And if you'll remember, we caught him a couple years later taking arms from Iran through the Karine A. So I just don't think that you can make a comparison between Yasser Arafat and Abu Mazen, somebody who's clearly committed to peace and who's prepared to stand on a peace platform. There's a reason Yasser Arafat couldn't make a deal.

It's also the case that you had at that time a Palestinian Authority that was overrun by corruption, overrun by its ties with terrorism. And you -- and strangely, you had Hamas, of course, sitting out as a resistance movement, not at all, by the way, involved in the politics at all. Now, I know that the inclusion of Hamas into the political system for elections has made things in some sense more complicated, but it has also made Hamas contest in the political system, and their inability to govern has led Hamas to, I think, some very -- to a very difficult situation in which they're trying to find their ways out. So the differences on the Palestinian side are very fundamental from 2000.

The differences on the Israeli side are also very fundamental. Do you really think Ariel Sharon was going to support the Camp David Accords -- Likud? Doesn't look like it, does it? Because in fact, the -- what has happened now is that by 2003 Ariel Sharon was able to -- was willing to make a shift for the right of the Israeli political spectrum and to begin to talk about dividing the land. The Herzliya speech was one of the most important speeches in Israeli political -- recent Israeli political history. He starts to talk about dividing the land. He accepts the two-state solution. He accepts the roadmap. And now the breadth of the Israeli political system that is actually united behind a two-state solution is very different than in 2000.

Finally, the Arabs in 2000 -- not really very involved in that process. And so I think you can -- yes, I think on paper there was a lot that was close. But the underlying circumstances, the ones who had to accept it, support it, I think those conditions are better now. But I totally agree that the proof will be in the pudding. We'll see how far they're able to go, given their specific political conditions today.

**QUESTION:** And can you anticipate bringing bridging proposals at some point?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Barbara, I'm not going to get ahead of the discussions I have with --

**QUESTION:** Madame Secretary --

**SECRETARY RICE:** First, I just totally (inaudible).

**QUESTION:** Okay. I'm just curious what you think the next steps might be on the Iranian nuclear front. I mean, it's -- when the 60 days will be up towards the end of next month, I guess. There's the sense out there that you think the Chapter 7 nature of this is sufficient. And I'm just wondering whether there is really the likelihood of yet another attempt at a resolution.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, there will be a review after 60 days. And I think at that point we can determine whether it's time for an immediate -- immediately for a new resolution or for -- you know, that augments the



resolution that's already in place, whether or not states are going to take further steps that might not be in the resolution but that might be supportive of the resolution.

I think over the next month or so, we're going to just have some -- have to have consultations about what next steps will be. But I think the achievement of a Chapter 7 resolution is a pretty important step. And I don't really think it's sufficient. I think I made clear that I -- that there are going to have be steps outside of that. But whether or not there are also steps inside the Security Council, I think we just have to evaluate.

**QUESTION:** Is there anything promising about what happened since that was put in place that you think has made a difference?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, what's promising is that the Iranians seems to be concerned about the effect that some of the private decisions, private sector decisions that are being made are --those decisions are having on their economy and apparently in their politics. And I think that's good.

**QUESTION:** Thanks. Also underlying -- does it look to you like the Iranians and the U.S. are now drifting -- I mean, I'm sorry, the Iraqi Government and the U.S. are drifting in different directions on that? You probably noticed that Hoshyar Zebari gave an interview this week in which he said: we want to continue to tighten our relations with the Iranians, we want to (inaudible) those offices that the U.S. raided and the consulates, we want to open more border crossings and so on and so forth.

**SECRETARY RICE:** I think there is no problem with the Iraqis increasing normal state-to-state relations with the Iranians. Maybe under those circumstances the Iranians will be more constructive. But when we find them doing things that are not constructive and particularly that are dangerous to our forces, then I think we've been very clear that we're going to go after those activities.

And the Iraqi Government, when they claimed to be diplomats and they were -- the first set claimed to be diplomats, carrying diplomatic passports, the Iraqi Government did the right thing. They were found doing activities that were not consistent with their diplomatic status and they were expelled. And so I think we can work very closely with the Iraqi Government about this. But we've always supported Iraqi diplomacy with their neighbors, both Syria and Iran.

**QUESTION:** Just to follow, can you confirm that those Iranians seized in Irbil will be freed tomorrow?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I can't. I don't have any information for you about it.

**QUESTION:** Yeah. Listening to Chris Hill's speech yesterday, there was something that struck me, not related to nuclear stuff. But he was kind of reminiscing about negotiating with Richard Holbrooke, with Milosevic and actually drinking scotch with Milosevic as they were doing these negotiations. And you know, the Dayton Peace Accords has turned out to actually to work rather well. And not to beat a dead horse on who you talk with or not, but I mean you look at something like the -- you know, those -- (laughter) --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Glenn, you're out there on a limb by yourself. What is it you're --

**QUESTION:** Iran and Syria. (Laughter.)

**QUESTION:** Iran and Syria. (Inaudible.)

**SECRETARY RICE:** Oh, Iran and Syria. I wasn't sure where this was going. Okay, all right. Iran and Syria. (Laughter.)

**QUESTION:** They drank scotch with Milosevic.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Yeah, therefore --

**QUESTION:** He's saying it worked.

**QUESTION:** You know, it was -- he was an indicted war criminal at the time. And why would that --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Let me not call up the obvious historical fact about what they were doing while they were negotiating with Milosevic. Let me not call up what -- the pressure that was put on Milosevic and the first implied threat and then later on what actually got Milosevic out of power. I'm not going to even bring that up because I don't want you to start making analogies. All right? It's like when people tell me about negotiating with the Soviet Union. Right?

**QUESTION:** I know. I've asked the question before. (Laughter.)

**SECRETARY RICE:** All right. With 1.5 million American forces in Europe. Look, I don't -- as I said to Neil the other day, I think history is instructive for what it tells you about how to think about difficult times and whether or not you can really see from within the time how things are unfolding. But it's actually not instructive, I think, when you say, well, you negotiated with them, why not negotiate with him. The circumstances are so different here.

And again, the Iranians have that opportunity. The question really shouldn't be why aren't we willing to talk to Tehran, the question should be why won't Tehran talk to us. Because the suspension of their enrichment and reprocessing capability would give them all kinds of entree and yet they can't quite do it. So what does that tell you about their ambitions? And then what does that tell you about the pitfalls of talking to them while those ambitions are continued to be pursued, while they continue to perfect their nuclear technologies, while you're talking to them about trying to improve the situation in Iraq, which they've clearly decided that it's not in their interest to improve the situation in Iraq.

So I often think that the -- when we talk about this, we just say you should talk to them. Well, toward what purpose? At what cost? What are you prepared to give? What is the leverage that exists in those talks? Those are the questions that I think you have to ask because I don't see it as just talking.

**QUESTION:** Didn't the Afghan Contact Group work?

**SECRETARY RICE:** Because I think in Afghanistan, the context for the Iranians was fundamentally different. And by the way, there is a contact -- there is a contact group in the international compact which I think can be used for this purpose.

**MR. MCCORMACK:** We have about five minutes left.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Okay. Let me take these guys real quick then because --

**QUESTION:** Speaking of Chris Hill, actually about North Korea. You said, obviously, many times that this has to be negotiated in any deal reached within the six-party talks.

**SECRETARY RICE:** Right.

**QUESTION:** But meeting for three days in Berlin, of all places, North Koreans and Americans, it just looks like because you could not make any progress in December at the six-party talks, now you're saying you're preparing. But it looks like the main things are being negotiated between the North Koreans and the Americans.

**SECRETARY RICE:** It's just not true, Nick. The United States -- first of all, Chris Hill met for two days with them in Beijing prior to the last six-party talks. And Berlin was handy for the two of them, so they decided to meet in Berlin. And the essential thing to remember here is that we are committed to the six-party framework because we believe that the six-party framework is the only way to get an agreement that is going to stick. If you can get an agreement and the five parties that actually have the right leverage, both negative and positive, are involved in that agreement, then you have the chance to both make an agreement and to make it stick. And so we're not going outside the six-party framework to bilateralize our discussions with the North Koreans. We will use bilateral contacts with the North Koreans when they are useful to prepare for the six-party talks and we've done that several times before.



But the six-party framework is -- and the six-party talks themselves -- are proving themselves to be extremely valuable. The President made the right decision to make that the framework for these negotiations, not bilateral talks, and we're going to stick to that. And the reason that I say they're proving extremely valuable, not just for negotiations but also when the North Koreans tested we already had a ready coalition of states ready to react.

**QUESTION:** But where's the line between bilateral talks to prepare for the six-party talks and the actual talks that would satisfy the North Koreans to help ultimately make a deal? Because many of the issues outstanding are between these two countries, they're not between the South and --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Well, no, of course and, look, there are outstanding issues between the Japanese and the North Koreans. And there are outstanding issues between the United States and the North Koreans. And everybody understands that that's why the joint statement is written as it is. It anticipates that there are going to have to be some things that are resolved on a bilateral basis, but within the context of a six-party agreement. So nothing that is resolved bilaterally is a bilateral agreement; it's a part of a six-party agreement. But it understands that there are certain things that are bilateral between the United States and the DPRK and some things that are bilateral between the DPRK and Japan. That's just the nature of this.

But the six-party framework is really -- I think it's the -- frankly, the best thing that we have done on this issue because it has brought the Chinese in. And I will tell you that the Chinese really are the ones who put forward ideas in the last round of the six-party talks and part of what the North Koreans are responding to is that.

Okay. Last one and then we'll go to --

**QUESTION:** I'm going to take advantage of my status as the new kid --

**SECRETARY RICE:** Okay.

**QUESTION:** -- and ask a newbie question which is, we've now spent a week traveling together in the Middle East and you've told us your vision of what diplomacy can and cannot achieve. And I'm just wondering while it might be a little early to start talking about this, what do you think will be your legacy of diplomacy in the Middle East? And if there is a certain diplomat in history that you would liken yourself to who would it be?

**SECRETARY RICE:** I have -- I really don't know. And I -- I mean, what my legacy will be. Look, I think the Administration and the President and I, as the President's chief diplomat, have clearly staked out a certain position about the Middle East that it was not stable before and that things had to change in the Middle East and that both the nature of the regimes in the Middle East there had to be a push for more openness, for pluralism, for democracy in the Middle East. That's obviously a central pillar of this President's policy in the Middle East.

Now, has it been -- will it be uneven? Yes, that's the nature of international politics. It doesn't move in a straight line. But I suppose, when people look back and they say, now what does the Middle East look like, ten years from now or 20 years from now or 30 years from now, it will be judged -- the policies will be judged on whether or not there are -- democracy has moved forward in the Middle East and has made progress in the Middle East and has footholds in the Middle East and whether or not extremists have been pushed out.

Okay. All right.

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